

The Independent News

Balloons Over Vermilion sees record crowds in fourth year

July 23, 2019



A record crowd of more than 24,000 over two days saw balloons fly from the Vermilion Regional Airport and throughout Danville as part of the fourth annual Balloons Over Vermilion that took place at the airport on July 12 & 13. Event organizers announced that the 2020 event will take place on July 10 & 11.

“Balloons will be back!” That’s what the organizers of Balloons Over Vermilion are saying after a record year for the festival.

On July 12 and 13 more than 24,000 people visited the Vermilion Regional Airport for Balloons Over Vermilion, making it the largest crowd for the festival to date. This marked a 20 percent increase from the inaugural festival in 2016.

“Over 11,000 children joined us for the two-day event, proving once again that Balloons Over Vermilion is all about the kids.” The festival announced in a press release on Friday morning.

This year’s festival saw liftoffs in all four of the scheduled balloon launches with beautiful Friday and Saturday morning community flights thrilling thousands throughout Danville and Vermilion County, and mass ascensions from the airport on Friday and Saturday evenings adding to the excitement.

The spectacular evening glows had perfect conditions to allow kids of all ages to enter the field and interact with over 30 giant illuminated hot air balloons and their pilots as they lit up the night skies, followed by beautifully synchronized, choreographed laser shows.

Friday’s events were dedicated to the memory of Julius W. Hegeler II, title sponsor of Balloons Over Vermilion since its inception, who passed away within the week before gates opened for the 2019 festival.

With family and close friends in attendance, opening ceremonies celebrated his extraordinary life and paid tribute to his military career, his love of kids and our community, and the huge impact his generosity has created for both present and future generations.

The tribute featured a flyover from local pilot, Jay Schroeder and three more pilots from Champaign, Tom Frasca, and David and Jud Nogle; flying over the event in airplanes from the 1940s and ‘50s in what is known as the “missing man formation” as a tribute to the Air Force Veteran of the Korean War.

Every year Balloons Over Vermilion adds something new and listens to feedback on things which can be improved. “Touch A Truck” in Kids Zone on Friday evening was wildly

successful, allowing visitors to get up close to all kinds of heavy equipment including tractors, firetrucks and even take a 360-degree spin in an Ameren lift truck.

A third tethered balloon was added and more people experienced what it's like to fly in a hot air balloon. Parking and traffic patterns were adjusted to accommodate the record-breaking number of vehicles at the airport and shuttle bus patrons.

At the end of both evenings traffic routes were reversed to accommodate convenient, timely and efficient exiting strategies, offering a better visiting experience for all our guests.

Organizers are encouraging everyone to mark their calendars now for Balloons Over Vermilion 2020 which will take place July 10th and 11th at the Vermilion Regional Airport and encourage those interested to follow them on social media for the latest updates.